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Interview with Prime Minister Nakasone

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This is a partial transcript of an interview with Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone by Washington Post editors and reporters yesterday.

Q: What is most on your mind that you would like to take home from your visit here?

A: I sincerely hope to establish a close relationship of personal trust and friendship with President Reagan so that we may place our bilateral relationship on a very firm foundation My desire is to find a breakthrough and proceed on a new road. Now that the United States and Japan are two economic giants in the world, we don't think we are allowed to stay comfortably where we have been.

The Japanese people have had deep respect for the United States and Japanese people like the United States and we are subconsciously becoming aware the time has come for this change. But the leaders have not led the Japanese people that way.

I have taken several actions during the first 60 days of my office. But these actions would not have been possible . . . without the support of the people

Q: It's the perception of most U.S. politicians that your country has never been more unpopular in this country than it is now. Legislation almost passed the last session of Congress to restrict Japanese exports to the United States. One important presidential candidate, [former] vice president Mondale, has been making overtly anti-Japanese speeches. What do you think are the main reasons for this and how important is it?

A: We are saddened to see this situation in the unemployment in the United States. We've seen on our television screens the plight in some of the major cities with large unemployment: unemployed people, for example, queuing up for free soup, or some people sleeping in their cars.

Although we are saddened by these sights, we have some suspicion that we might possibly be being scapegoated in connection with your elections. In the United States you are coming to a transition period in terms of your industrial structure. For example, you are shifting industrial activity and employment away from traditional heavy manufacturing industry such as automobiles into more sophisticated high-technology industries. There's been demographic changes from north to south and so on.

I think some of these problems like unemployment, frictions are caused by this transitional nature of your industrial economy. A somewhat similar situation is prevailing in Japan, too.

So on the economic issues, my policy is to remain cool-headed and take a long-term view and solve these issues steadily, one by one. The import of free trade has indeed repercussions on the entire world economy. I don't think we should commit the offense of repeating the tragedy of the 1930s

The United States Congress is dealing with the entire world There the U.S. differs from Japan and other countries. I should hope that American legislators will regard the entire world as their constituency once they are elected, instead of being concerned with their own constituencies only

Q: When your predecessor, Mr. [Zenko] Suzuki, was here in May, 1981, he said about defense that Japan was limited very much by its constitution and there was really very little prospect of amending it to take a different role, and that Japan would seek to defend the home islands and the sea lanes out to 1,000 miles. What is your position?

A: First let me say the constitutional issue is a very delicate issue and I have in my mind a very long-range timetable, so to

speak, but I would not dare mention it even in our Diet It has been considered a taboo to talk of a revision of the constitution or to criticize the constitution. My belief is that in a democratic society there should be no such taboo.

On defense and trade issues . . . we should not be acting because of the pressure or influence from the United States but we should be acting in our own self-interest. This has been my very strong belief during the 37 years of my life in the Japanese legislature

I did serve once as the minister for defense and I have my own view about our defense. My own view of defense is that the whole Japanese archipelago or the Japanese islands should be like an unsinkable aircraft carrier putting up a tremendous bulwark of defense against infiltration of the [Soviet] Backfire bomber. To prevent Backfires from penetrating through this wall should be our first goal.

The second target objective should be to have complete and full control of four straits that go through the Japanese islands so that there should be no passage of Soviet submarines and other naval activities.

The third objective is to secure and maintain the ocean lines of communication. For the ocean, our defense should extend several hundred miles, and if we are to establish sea lanes then our desire would be to defend the sea lanes between Guam and Tokyo and between the Strait of Taiwan and Osaka

Q: You mentioned the objective of defending against the Backfire and bottling up the Soviet submarine fleet in the strait. Do you anticipate that your government will accept these as missions for the Japanese defense posture?

A: Previous Japanese administrations have been rather ambiguous on it. But my administration is quite clear on it. But I don't see any need to advertise it

P. 1 of 2

Nakasone

Q: What has changed in Japan to give you the opportunity that you see to implement changes?

A: ... I would say it's the tide of times

....
Thirty-seven years after Japan won the Russo-Japanese war, there broke out the war in the Pacific. At the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese war ... [for] the next 37 years Japan kept expanding, gaining territory, thus bringing about isolation from the rest of the world, resulting in that tragedy Another 37 years—after the end of the Second World War—we [have been] expanding economically, and because of that expansion we are risking being isolated from the rest of the world.

... Political leaders [before World War II] lacked enough courage to resist their military Political leaders today have a very difficult job trying to keep Japan from being isolated

Q: To follow on that, does that suggest that you believe that at this point there must be some political limits to the Japanese economic expansion in the world?

A: Yes. You are right

Q: What you said earlier is quite surprising—37 years your country has been focused on one objective, economic growth. And now you call for a change. In 37 years the Japanese people have come from a very, very low standard of living right after the war to one of the highest ones and the fastest growing in the world. What does your change of policy mean for the Japanese people?

A: We will continue our efforts for economic growth, but without causing adverse repercussions on the rest of the world. I would exert my leadership to our nation so that our people will make more effort to become a harmonious member of the international community

P. 2 of 2